

REMARKS

Claims 48-62 are presented for consideration, with Claim 48 being independent.

Initially, Applicants wish to thank the Examiner for the courtesy extended toward their representative during the personal interview on July 7, 2004. The interview focused primarily on independent Claim 48 and U.S. Patent No. 6,319,322, to Ueda.

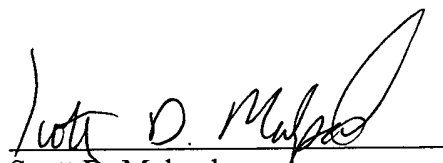
As discussed during the interview, Ueda relates to a substrate processing apparatus with temperature regulation performed at a buffer cassette, wherein a wafer is temporarily housed before and after being delivered to and from an aligner, or at an inlet side delivery stage of a portion for delivering a wafer to the alignment. In this manner, precise temperature regulation can be achieved. Ueda describes an interface section 12 as being naturally exhausted, to be under normal pressure, whereas the inside of the aligner is under positive pressure by the clean gas supplied from outside (col. 9, lines 55-58). As understood, Ueda therefore sets forth that a pressure inside of the interface section 12 is made to be a normal pressure, rather than made to be in a vacuum or to provide a pressure space lower than an atmospheric pressure space (see, column 9, lines 55-58). To further distinguish Applicants' invention from Ueda, Claim 48 has been amended to set forth that the vacuum mechanism creates a vacuum below atmospheric pressure inside of a port section through which the wafer is transferred.

The Examiner tentatively agreed at the interview that amending Claim 48 in this manner would distinguish over Ueda.

Accordingly, reconsideration and withdrawal of the outstanding rejection of Claims 48-62 under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) in view of Ueda is respectfully requested.

Applicants' undersigned attorney may be reached in our Washington, D.C. office by telephone at (202) 530-1010. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our below listed address.

Respectfully submitted,



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